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SCHILLER AND THE GENESIS OF ROMANTICISM

PART I

In two papers previously published in this journal¹ I have shown that the conception of "Romantic" poetry was developed by Friedrich Schlegel as a consequence of his preoccupation during his first period (1793-6) with the problem of formulating the distinguishing characteristics of classical, or ancient, and of modern art. The æsthetic qualities which, after he had learned to admire them, Schlegel named "Romantic," were simply the qualities which he had earlier defined, and condemned, as the attributes of *das eigentümlich Moderne*. During his period of "classicism" Schlegel, as I have also pointed out, adhered to an æsthetic theory in which the (supposed) example of Greek practise, and abstract principles derived by analogy from the Kantian epistemology, were curiously interwoven. Art must aim at "objective" beauty, must conform to æsthetic laws which are based upon the essential constitution of the human mind as such, and are therefore the same for all peoples and in all ages. Modern poetry, in its typical manifestations, is degenerate because it is "interessante Poesie," that is, because it appeals to the varying subjective "interest" of individuals or of special types of mind; because it takes for its favorite theme "das Charakteristische," that is, the individual person or unique situation, rather than the generic type; and because in its endeavor to represent the fullness and variety of life, it forgets the fundamental truth that "all art consists in limitation," by austere adherence to which Greek poetry had been able to achieve æsthetic perfection.

¹ "On the Meaning of 'Romantic' in Early German Romanticism," Pt. I, November, 1916. Pt. II, February, 1917.

All this is close akin to Schiller's æsthetics of the same period. Schiller at this time, as Walzel has remarked, fully shared the *Grökomanie* for which he afterwards ridiculed Schlegel; and it was in its "objectivity" that, for him too, the superiority of ancient art lay.² "Objective" beauty, though it depends upon an appeal to the senses and requires a sensible medium, is "independent of all *empirical* conditions of sensibility, and remains the same even when the subjective condition (*Privatbeschaffenheit*) of the individual is altered. . . . It is pleasing, not to the individual, merely, but to the species." Like the valid judgment in the Kantian logic, the work of art must attain "necessity and universality." "Das Gebiet der eigentlich schönen Kunst kann sich nur so weit erstrecken, als sich in der Verknüpfung der Erscheinungen Notwendigkeit entdecken lässt." But nothing is "necessary" in the constitution of any individual mind except its "generic character." The poet, therefore, must address himself exclusively to those feelings which are uniform and common to the race; and in order to do this, he must, at least for the moment, strip himself of all that is peculiar and distinctive in his own personality. "Nur alsdann, wenn er nicht als der oder der bestimmte Mensch (in welchem die Gattung immer beschränkt sein würde), sondern wenn er als Mensch überhaupt empfindet, ist er gewiss, dass die ganze Gattung ihm nachempfinden werde." Schiller's rage against the unique, the individual as such, goes so far, in this "classical" period of his æsthetic opinions, that he does not shrink from asserting the singular paradox that "every individual man is the less man, by so much as he is individual."⁴ And in "objective" art the thing portrayed, as well as the mind of the artist, must be generalized, purged of all that is specific or idiosyncratic: "in einem Gedicht darf nichts wirkliche (historische) Natur sein, denn alle Wirklichkeit ist mehr oder weniger Beschränkung jener allgemeinen Naturwahrheit."⁵

In the *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (published in *Die Horen* in the beginning of 1795) Schiller's position is in some respects a transitional one. But he still insists upon the "objectivity," "universal validity," and immutability of æsthetic standards; regards the quieting of the passions as a

² *Zerstreute Betrachtungen, usw.* 1793.

³ From the review of Friedrich Matthisson's *Gedichte*, 1794.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

criterion of beauty; reiterates the already familiar thesis of the "disinterestedness" of æsthetic enjoyment; denies æsthetic value to "didactic" or "philosophical" poetry; defines the creation or perception of beauty as at once complete freedom and rigorous subjection to law; characterizes art as a kind of "play"; and assigns to the Greeks the rank of "supreme masters" in art. In making the "æsthetic" result from the interaction of two anti-thetic elements or impulsions in the human mind, the *sinnlicher Trieb* or *Stofftrieb* and the *Formtrieb*, Schiller again was merely devising a terminology of his own to express an antithesis which was prominent in Schlegel's early æsthetic essays. The *Stofftrieb* has "life in the widest sense for its object" and causes the artist to seek "the most many-sided contact with the world."⁶ The *Formtrieb* "seeks unity and permanence" rather than fullness and variety of content; it "imposes harmony upon the diversity of the manifestations of man's nature"; it gives laws which are not subject to change, and is the source of all "necessity and universality" in our judgments of whatever sort. Just so did Schlegel contrast the craving for *Stoff*, which he conceived to be the weakness of modern taste, with the predominance of the sense of form in Greek art: "Im Grunde völlig gleichgültig gegen alle Form, und nur voll unersättlichen Durstes nach Stoff, verlangt auch das feinere Publikum von dem Künstler nichts als interessante Individualität."⁷

Schiller, it is true, already regarded both these "impulsions" as necessary in any valid operation of the mind, whether it be a logical judgment or an act of æsthetic creation or appreciation. Arguing as he did from the analogy of Kant's theory of knowledge, he was, of course, pre-committed to this view. There are, he observes, two extremes in æsthetic theory, both faulty in their one-sidedness. There are those who "fear to rob beauty of its freedom by a too severe analysis"; but these fail to reflect "that the freedom in which they are entirely right in placing the essence of beauty is not lawlessness, but a harmony of laws, not caprice but the highest internal necessity." There are, on the other hand, those who "fear lest through a too bold inclusiveness, the distinctness of the concept of beauty may be destroyed"; these forget that "this distinctness of beauty which they are equally right in

⁶ Letter 13.

⁷ *Ueber das Studium* usw.; *Minor, Jugendschriften*, I, 91.

demanding, consists, not in the exclusion of certain realities, but in the absolute *inclusion* of all; so that it is not limitation (*Begrenzung*) but infinitude." This seems a negation of the maxim in which Schlegel summed up the essence of classicism: *alle Kunst ist beschränkt*. But for Schiller, too, in point of fact, "form" is still the paramount consideration in art: "nur von der Form ist wahre ästhetische Freiheit zu erwarten. Darin also besteht das eigentliche Kunstgeheimnis des Meisters, dass er den Stoff durch die Form vertilgt."⁹

Thus throughout the first half of the seventeen-nineties Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel, in spite of minor differences, employed the same general categories in their reflection upon æsthetic questions and adhered to the same type of æsthetic doctrine—to a doctrine characterized by an insistence upon "objective" æsthetic standards, by a conviction of the priority of "form" over "content," of unity over expressiveness, in art, and by a belief in the superiority of ancient art, as the most adequate realization of these standards. Meanwhile there were at work in Fr. Schlegel's thought from the first two forces which became powerful predisposing causes of his eventual conversion from the "classical" to the Romantic ideal. The first of these was the influence upon him of the very philosophy from which he and Schiller had derived the principal theoretical justification for their classicism. That justification, as I have pointed out, consisted largely in a transfer to the field of æsthetics of certain conceptions and categories which they had found in Kant's epistemology. But there was a curious duality about the Kantian influence; it tended in two quite opposite directions. An æsthetics constructed out of analogies taken from the theoretical philosophy of Kant, and from one portion of his moral philosophy, would, indeed, seek to confine art within the strait-jacket of "laws of universal validity," uniform for all peoples and all times, and to attain this uniformity by the avoidance of all themes and moods which are "characteristic," *i. e.*, individual or local or peculiar to a special historical situation. But there was another part of Kant's ethics which suggested, by analogy, a very different standard of æsthetic values. In its final formulation, the categorical imperative is represented by Kant as an ideal capable, not of actual realization, but only of an endlessly progressive approximation.

⁸ Letter 18.

⁹ Letter 22.

The object of a will that is capable of being determined by the moral law is the production in the world of the highest good. Now, the supreme condition of the highest good is the perfect harmony of the disposition with the moral law . . .—a perfection of which no rational being existing in the world of sense is capable at any moment of his life. . . . Since, nevertheless, such a harmony is morally required of us, . . . the pure practical reason forces us to assume a practical progress towards it, *in infinitum*, as the real object of our will. . . . A finite rational being is capable only of an infinite progress from lower to higher stages of moral perfection.¹⁰

Fichte had, by 1794, converted this Kantian conception of the moral ideal as an endless pursuit of a forever unattainable goal into a metaphysical principle, and had represented the very nature of all existence as an infinite and insatiable striving of the Absolute Ego, whereby it first sets up the external world as an obstacle to its own activity, and then gradually but endlessly triumphs over this obstacle. The notion of infinity thus took precedence in philosophy over that of the finite and determinate, the category of Becoming over that of Being, the ideal of activity over that of achieved completion, the mood of endless longing over that of quietude and collectedness of mind.

Now, *this* Kantian principle, when transferred from ethics to æsthetics, was obviously irreconcilable with those critical standards which were of the essence of the young Schlegel's "classicism"; it implied that the "laws of beauty" are relative and variable from age to age, and that art is subject to a continuous evolution. What, therefore, we find in his æsthetic writings from the beginning is a conflict between the two tendencies, both alike chiefly Kantian in their origin—a conflict in which the ideal of classical "objectivity" at first has on the whole the upper hand, but only precariously and by means of palpable inconsistencies. In what is probably the earliest of Schlegel's attempts to define the essence of classical and of modern culture (*Vom Wert des Studiums der Griechen und Römer*, 1794) we already find him attempting to "explain ancient history by means of a theory based upon the most recent philosophy," i. e., upon the Kantian. There are, he observes, two possible ways of conceiving the general course of history—as a movement which returns upon itself in repeated cycles, or as an endless and unceasing progression. The first of these conceptions, the *System*

¹⁰ *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 219-221.

des Kreislaufes, satisfies the better the demands of what Kant called the theoretical reason; it does so, Schlegel apparently means, because it alone enables us to conceive of the content of history, in Kantian terms, as a "completed synthesis," as a genuine unity. But "the only way of representing history which would satisfy the *practical* reason," with its necessity for seeking a perpetually nearer approach to an unattainable perfection, is the *System der unendlichen Fortschreitung*. Thus, upon Kantian principles, "it is manifest *a priori* that there must exist two types of culture, according as the *representative* faculty or the *conative* faculty (das vorstellende oder das strebende Vermögen) is primary and preponderant: a natural and an artificial culture; that the former must come first in time, and is a necessary antecedent to the latter; and that the *System des Kreislaufes* is possible only in the natural type of culture, the *System der unendlichen Fortschreitung* only in the artificial type."¹¹

Thus the culture of the ancients is based upon the former, modern culture upon the latter, conception of the historic process. The underlying common factor in the civilization of the Greeks and Romans, the thing which gives unity to their history, is the manifold influence upon their thought and life of the *System des Kreislaufes*, in other words, of the assumption that no continuous forward movement, in any province of human activity, is to be expected or desired. This, "more or less definitely expressed, was not only the view of the greatest Greek and Roman historians, but was also the universal mode of thought of the people—which erred only in this, that it regarded the outcome of their own history as having universal validity, as if it were the outcome of the history of all mankind." The circularity of ancient civilization is shown, among other ways, by its inevitable decline. Having a finite goal, it was able to attain that goal completely; but after it had done so, it could change only for the worse.

Since modern civilization is, on the other hand, informed by a wholly different conception of history, its art and all the other manifestations of its distinctive spirit cannot and should not be

¹¹ I accept Walzel's identification of the version of this essay printed by him in DNL, 143, with the original text, though the possibility that this version may represent one of the two later revisions does not seem to me to be absolutely excluded. The internal evidence, however, is on the whole in favor of the earlier date.

mere attempts to reproduce the alien excellence attained by the ancients. We moderns "must learn that it is not our vocation to live *wie Bettler von den Almosen der Vorwelt*." Every age, like every individual, is an end in itself, and has "an unalienable right to *be itself*." "Through the satisfaction of the demands of the practical reason, which alone determines the direction of modern culture, the power and perfection of ancient culture gains its highest worth; and if *our* history must remain ever uncompleted, our goal unattained, our striving unsatisfied, yet is our goal infinitely great." This has the air not only of a declaration of independence of "classical" standards, but even of a bold proclamation of the superiority of the æsthetic and moral ideals of the modern world. Yet the greater part of the essay is rather a glorification of the ancients. "The study of the Greeks and Romans is a school of the great, the good, the noble, the beautiful, of *humanity*; from it we may regain free abundance, living power, unity, balance, harmony, completeness, which the still crude art of modern culture has belittled, mutilated, confused, deranged, dismembered and destroyed." "The most eminent Greeks and Romans of the best period are a sort of supermen (*wie Wesen übermenschlicher Art*), men in the highest style."¹² Here, manifestly, is a doctrine imperfectly at unity with itself, a *Gräkomanie* which is trying to keep house with its own negation. If modern art has a fundamentally different meaning and ideal, it was an obvious inconsistency to demand that the modern artist should gain his inspiration from ancient models: and if the modern ideal of *unendliche Vervollkommnung* is the higher, not even the best embodiments of a distinctively "classical" culture could properly be regarded as exemplifying the full possibilities of human nature.

The same unstable equilibrium in Schlegel's standards is illustrated in another of his essays, of about the same date, which deals more specifically with æsthetic questions (*Über die Grenzen des*

¹² Cf. also the following (*op. cit.*, p. 263): "In der Geschichte der Griechen und Römer sind die Stufen der Bildung ganz bestimmt, die reinen Arten entschieden und vollkommen, das Einzelne so kühn und vollendet, dass es das Ideal seiner Art, der Griechen der Mensch *κατ' ἐξοχήν* ist, die Gründe einfach, die Ordnung fließend, die Massen gross und einfach, das Ganze vollständig. Sie ist der Kommentar der Philosophie, der ewige Kodex des menschlichen Gemüths, eine *Naturgeschichte des sittlichen und geistigen Menschen*."

Schönen).¹³ While, here too, the superiority of the poetry of the ancients is emphatically asserted, and while the classical ideal, with its insistence upon form, measure, restraint, the Delphic *Μηδὲν ἄγαν*, both in art and conduct, is extolled, it is nevertheless also remarked that classical art, since its excellence was rather the result of instinct than of reflective insight, was not merely incapable of progress, but was predestined to aberration and degeneration. The very defects of modern art, on the other hand, are the ground of hope, *unsere Mängel sind unsere Hoffnungen*; for those defects arise from the predominance in it of man's self-conscious intelligence (*Verstand*), "dessen zwar langsame Vervollkommnung gar keine Schranken kennt." And when this faculty "has accomplished its task of assuring to mankind a permanent basis and giving to it an unchangeable *direction*, there will then be no more occasion to doubt whether man's history is forever to return upon itself like a circle, or is endlessly to progress from better to better." The whole essay leaves a singularly confused impression upon the reader; for the author seems unable to decide between the two æsthetic ideals which alternately present themselves to his mind. He craves, in fact, *both* achieved perfection and the potentiality of progress, both inner harmony and unappeasable self-dissatisfaction; and since modern art by its very essence, as he conceives it, lacks the one type of excellence, and ancient art lacks the other, he seems unable to pronounce definitely in favor of either.

What, amid these waverings and inconsistencies, it is, for our present purpose, important to note in the early writings of Fr. Schlegel is that they contain ideas (along with their opposites) which closely approximate certain of the characteristic conceptions of Schiller's later essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*. In them already we find the following antitheses, each pair being parallel to, or correlative with, all of the others:¹⁴

Klassische Kunst—moderne Kunst
 Natürliche Bildung—künstliche Bildung
 Vorstellendes Vermögen—strebendes Vermögen
 System des Kreislaufes—System der unendlichen Fortschreitung.¹⁵

¹³ First published in *Der neue Teutsche Merkur*, May, 1795; Minor, *Jugendschriften*, pp. 21-27.

¹⁴ *Jugendschriften*, I, 22.

¹⁵ It is also to be remarked that Schlegel already saw in the introduction

The second force which drove Schlegel towards his later, or Romantic, position need only be mentioned here, as I have already called attention to it in one of the papers previously published. It was the influence of a quality of his own natural taste and temperament. However much, under compulsion of the theory to which he was committed, he might deplore the modern world's craving for "content," for "the interesting," for "the characteristic" and individuated, and its relative indifference to the laws of pure form, it was none the less true that in his nature what Schiller had called the *Stofftrieb* was exceedingly powerful, not to say preponderant. His curiosity about life and human nature was far too keen to make it likely that he would be permanently content with a theory of art which required the poet to portray only generalized types, and forbade him to let any disclosure of his own personality or his own mood slip into his compositions. One example, among many which might be cited, of this inner incongruity between the temper of Friedrich Schlegel's mind and his early æsthetic theory, may be seen in his essay "On the Female Characters in Greek Poetry." While insisting that the Greek poets were true to the principles of fine art in refraining from the attempt to paint with portrait-like detail "interesting men and women as individuals," Schlegel cannot forbear to lament that no such individualized and realistic portraits of Greek character have come down to us.¹⁶

Schlegel's Romantic doctrine of art, then, was already implicit in these two characteristics of his first period: (a) in the implication of the analogy from the Kantian ethics to æsthetics, *viz.*, that art should be characterized by a constant enlargement of its boundaries and an endless progression towards an unattainably remote ideal, rather than by any definite perfection of form attainable by adhering to immutable laws and narrow limitations of aim; and (b) in his temperamental admiration for such a poet as Shakespeare and his strong though suppressed desire for a poetry which, imitating Shakespeare, should take all of life for its province, and make the abundance and fidelity of its expression of life the sole

of Christianity the prime cause of that change of ideals and of conceptions of the historic process which differentiates modern from classical art. But this is a subject that calls for separate treatment. Cf. *Vom Wert des Studiums der Griechen und Römer*, in DNL, 143, p. 261, and *Jugend-schriften*, I, 99; II, 42.

¹⁶ *Jugend-schriften*, I, 39.

criterion of artistic success. Yet Schlegel, until 1796, never wholly yielded to this temperamental inclination and never recognized the full consequences of the Kantian analogy or its inconsistency with his classicism and his standards of *objektive Schönheit*. On the contrary, in his long disquisition "On the Study of Greek Poetry," completed in 1795, his "Objektivitätswut," his rage against the aberrations of the moderns, his reverence for "the *a priori* laws of pure beauty," his conviction that poetry can be true to its vocation only by the most rigorous limitation of the range of its themes and of its methods—all these seem stronger than ever. Some impulsion from without was necessary to enable him to take the one step farther which was required by the concessions he had already made, and so to pass definitely to the position to which he was to give the name "Romantic."

In another instalment of this study I shall present the evidence which shows conclusively that this impulsion came from Schiller's essay "Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung," especially the second part of it, published in *Die Horen* in December, 1795. But I shall at the same time attempt to make clear the precise logical relation between Schiller's conception of "sentimentalische Dichtung" and Schlegel's ideal of "romantische Poesie"—a relation in which there is even more of difference than of similarity.

ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY.

Johns Hopkins University.

UN "ROUSSEAUISTE" EN AMÉRIQUE

(*L'Abeille Française*, de Joseph Nançrède)

C'est à l'Université du Vermont, à Burlington, que nous avons mis la main un jour sur *L'Abeille Française*, de Nançrède, un ouvrage rare et intéressant à plus d'un point de vue. D'abord, c'est sans doute le premier livre de classe français composé spécialement à l'usage des écoles américaines — plus spécifiquement pour les étudiants de Harvard. Ensuite, il est l'œuvre d'un de ces nombreux Français, qui, aux jours de la Révolution, passèrent l'océan, soit comme réfugiés politiques, soit comme soldats; Nançrède est un esprit parent de celui de Moreau de Saint-Méry dont nous avons